February 21, 2012

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I have received many e-mails and phone calls lately in regards to the grading practices going on in the Voyager Language Arts classes. Many parents are concerned, because I have been using a “non-traditional” grading system. While the system is less traditional it is widely used in many middle schools. The system does not accumulate as many points per grading period as you are used to, but that doesn’t mean that there aren’t as many times throughout the grading period that your child is being assessed. This “non-traditional” grading practice is called Formative Assessment and it is intended to give students information about their own learning.

Two years ago I joined the Formative Assessment Core Team (FACT), which is a group of teachers and administrators from Clyde-Green Springs Schools committed to helping the district implement Formative Assessment practices into classrooms district-wide. The practice has been recognized in many studies as a research-based best practice in education.

The purpose of grades is to measure a student’s mastery of the Ohio Department of Education Grade Level Standards and Indicators as applied to the grade in which a student is enrolled. Parents have every right to expect that grades and state testing will show similar results due to the fact that both are assessments of the same content, the State Standards. My job is to be honest with parents and students about the student’s progress in achieving these standards.

One of the purposes of formative assessment is to have a more accurate measurement of the student’s independent mastery.  It is the assessment that is most important—not the practice activity completed to get to mastery of a concept.  Teachers give students sufficient practice and then assess students’ understanding of the material.  A skill assessment or a unit test has more weight than practice, because it measures student’s independent level of mastery of a particular skill or set of skills. Often times a classroom assignment is not a measurement of the student’s independent work.  The teacher could have completed part of the assignment as a class, the teacher could have ensured that the students knew the directions, the students could have worked in groups or pairs, and/or the students could have been allowed to take the assignment home to complete.  This MAY or MAY NOT have been entirely a student independent work sample. Homework is extremely important for providing practice, for remediating a skill, and/or for preparing for upcoming tests.  Some students have parents that are more involved in their child’s school work and provide a lot of help at home.  Some students have parents that are unable to provide as much assistance.  For this reason, homework is not used as often to formulate a trimester grade. A student’s grade could be easily inflated if a student receives assistance on a math class assignment and/or homework assignment and receives a high mark. This would send the message that a grade on a chapter test completed independently has the same meaning or weight as a class and/or homework assignment completed with assistance.  In a nutshell, in this grading system work is assessed primarily on quality in relation to standards rather than student attitude or effort.

To help this make more sense I will try to give you a picture of what happens in my room. As we begin each unit of study I write the goals we will be working to achieve on the board and review them with the students. These goals are taken directly from the state standards, our curriculum, but written in “kid-friendly” language. The teaching, learning, assessment, and practice going on in the classroom revolve around these goals. Students are often given a rubric or some type of example showing what they are reaching to achieve in this unit. I try to go over examples of mistakes made, and teach how to correct them, frequently during the unit. I give multiple assessments throughout the unit, orally or written and record progress in the grade book. If a student does not do well on the assessment the first time, I will try to give some type of intervention activity in a variety of ways; one-on-one instruction, small group or class-wide instruction, technology based intervention, in class or take- home practice, to improve the students’ mastery of the skill. If intervention has been given to improve a skill I will record it in the progress book in the comments section. If the students improves this skill the next time the skill is assessed that grade will change to show their improvement. It is my intention to help each student meet all of the learning goals, but I cannot make this happen all on my own. Students must be willing to take learning into their own hands which means they should study notes and read often to improve and make their goals a reality.

If you would like more information about Formative Assessment I found the following website to be very informative:

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/110017/chapters/The-Fundamentals-of-Formative-Assessment.aspx>

If you should have any additional questions please feel free to contact me at school (419)547-9150 or by e-mail, [stjgreenslade@clyde.k12.oh.us](mailto:stjgreenslade@clyde.k12.oh.us)

Sincerely,

Jeanette M. Greenslade

Voyager Language Arts Teacher